

Bruce Dickinson reveals the full force of his dramatic pulling power

BRUCE DICKINSON

The Mandrake Project

BMG

Metal's celebrated frontman embarks on an all-encompassing adventure

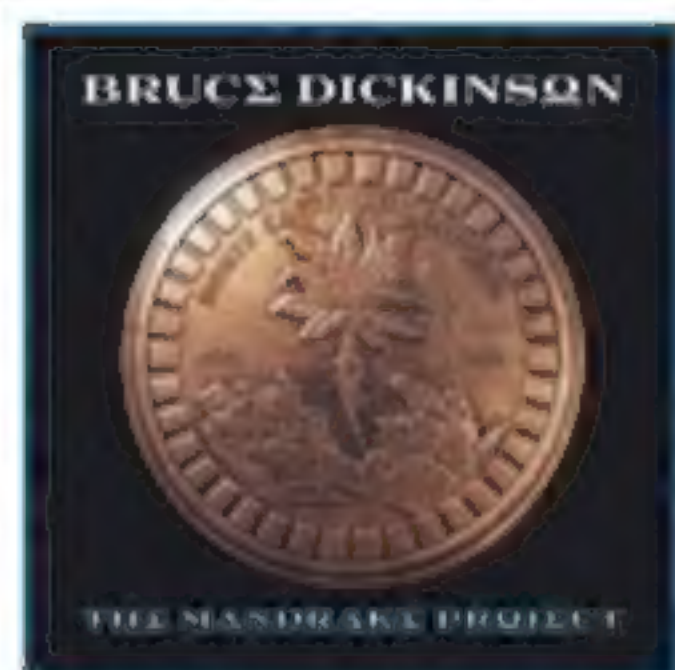
AFTER SPLITTING FROM Iron Maiden in 1993, Bruce's solo career ascended to a stunning creative apex with 1998's *The Chemical Wedding*, a heavyweight William Blake concept opus providing sharp relief against the contemporaneous Maiden disc, low-point *Virtuall XI*. Hatchets have long since been buried, and Bruce's creative focus has remained Maiden-centred for nearly

THE MANDRAKE PROJECT FLIES BY, BUT STILL FEELS LIKE AN EPIC JOURNEY

20 years, assimilating his eccentric force of personality into a six-way endeavour. Unloosed again at last from these democratic checks and balances, Bruce's extraordinary voice – in every sense: larynx, character and attitude – resounds from guitarist Roy Z's spectacularly thick, fervid production. The singer has rarely sounded more assertive, upfront and in your face, while his commitments to narrative storytelling and wide-open imagination have seldom reached higher, urging his vocals to new levels of expressive emotion and dramatic control.

As with *The Chemical Wedding*, there is a powerful

unifying sweep to the album, even if the concepts can feel quite cryptic and abstruse, with meanings and nuances that need to be unlocked like new levels of a game quest. Videogames, rather than movies, are a plausible pointer to the album's soundtrack-like impulses. Atmospheric noises and symphonic flourishes burst and brood with dark, grainy intensity, making a virtue of their synthetic origins. Crucially, these densely layered, orchestrated soundscapes and sophisticated arrangements are frequently counterpointed against direct, stripped-back volleys of classic metal heroism. Killer tunes like *Many Doors To Hell*, goth-tinged headbanger *Resurrection Men* and the non-balladic half of *Shadow Of The Gods* impel delicious raised fists with their spunky





NWOBHM riffing and meaty, scream-along choruses.

Bruce's best solo work has always skewed towards heftier tones. *Pants* were soiled in '98 by *King In Crimson's* Obituary-heavy guitar sound, and *The Mandrake Project* rapidly pulls its weight, opening advance cut *Afterglow Of Ragnarok* getting underway with a marauding riff that's half Swedish true metal sword-wavers Grand Magus, half UK death metal warhorses Bolt Thrower. One fascinating, unprecedented surprise is the remake of Iron Maiden's *If Eternity Should Fail*, here ominously retitled *Eternity Has Failed*. Shorter, slower, heavier and darker than the song we've known and loved for nine years, this is technically its original incarnation, a measure of how long this LP has taken to come together. Either way, it's a great song, arguably besting the original by substituting

a real flute for Maiden's synthesised trumpet intro.

The Mandrake Project demands and rewards total absorption into its kaleidoscopic sound picture. Multiple strands of Bruce's solo career are drawn together throughout. There's the accessible hard rock of 1990's *Tattooed Millionaire*, the ambitious versatility of 1994's *Balls To Picasso*, the snappy cosmic prog of 1996's *Skunkworks* – as well as the profound, elegant metal classicism that is the man's primary skillset – with lyrical references to old songs adding to the cohesive, celebratory vibe. Technically, it's an hour long, but *The Mandrake Project* is so filled with ideas it seems to fly by in no time, yet still feels like an epic journey.

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FOR FANS OF: Iron Maiden, Judas Priest, Black Sabbath

CHRIS CHANTLER



ALFAHANNE

Vår Tid Är Nu

DARK ESSENCE

Swedish black'n'rollers in need of more bark with their bite

Songs about death, flames and wolves. Chums with musicians you could charitably label 'naughty'. Naming your band 'alpha male'. Ja, this is Swedish black metal. Alfahanne's fifth album is their most traditionally BM yet, drier than a sand-rat's sphincter, festooned with true kvlt tremolo and reverb – but is there much else? There's plenty, but it lacks WOOF. Alfa Omega's Swedish-as-a-semi punk kneecaps itself with the cheapest horns this side of the Christmas sales, while the slidy guitar through *Eremiten* and *Wolfman* is more *SpongeBob SquarePants* than *Wayfarer*. When Alfahanne balance crusty aggression, bleakness and rock'n'roll catchiness perfectly, you get *g:re Cirkeln*. Kvelertak-ish gang vocals and groove abound. Shame the rest is a bit *Kampf*-lite.

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FOR FANS OF: Kampf, Wormwood, Kvelertak

ALEC CHILLINGWORTH



BARATRO

The Sweet Smell Of Unrest

IMPROVED SEQUENCE

Ex-Unsane guitarist adds a touch of melody to the battery

While heavy metal withered on the vine in the alt rock 90s, the US noise-rock scene was pulverising ears coast to coast, with Unsane leading the feral pack. After leaving the band in 2017, Unsane

ALBUM REVIEWS

bassist Dave Curran moved to Italy, found a couple of soulmates in a Milan squat, and formed Baratro, who straddle the rocket engine roar of Curran's old band but hammer the relentless assault into something almost tuneful. Their debut album is a careening bulldozer of molasses-thick sludge and face-stabbing hardcore. From the sub-basement rock'n'roll of *Fighting The Parking Meter* to the sickly lurch of *Pope Of Dope*, ...*Unrest* is as catchy as it is terrifying.

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FOR FANS OF: Unsane, Melvins, Whores

KEN MCINTYRE



BARREN WOMB

Chemical Tardigrade

FUCKING NORTH POLE/
BLUES FOR THE RED ELM

Norwegian noise rock duo reassert their invincibility

Barren Womb's 2020 album, *Lizard Lounge*, deservedly caught the attention of a lot of people. A caustic mix of Scandi-rock swagger, wince-inducing sonic chaos and throbbing post-punk rhythms, it gave the pair a high bar to reach with its follow-up. Impressively, this fifth album does that with ease. The most noticeable reason is the production; Barren Womb sound bigger, fatter, heavier, wilder and even more unhinged this time around, but the songs are better, and the scope is broader too. For example, *Bachelor Of Puppets* manages to take Big Black, Bleach-era Nirvana, Queens Of The Stone Age and The Bronx and turn them into one big hard-rock rager. A hugely exciting return.

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FOR FANS OF: Shellac, Death From Above 1979, Lightning Bolt

STEPHEN HALL

Darkest Hour's reputation is still growing after three decades



DARKEST HOUR

Perpetual / Terminal

MNRK HEAVY

Metallic hardcore's abiding underdogs keep their fires burning

NEXT YEAR WILL mark a full three decades as an active band for Washington DC's cult metallic hardcore heroes Darkest Hour. During that time, they have created a pretty compelling argument for being the most underrated and under-appreciated band from that early 2000s, Killswitch Engage-led, metalcore boom. We're now 10 albums in and the quintet are still full of the pace, ingenuity and spite that has made each of their albums such a pleasure.

Save for the excellent, acoustic opening to the Blind Melon-esque *Mausoleum*, there's really nothing new or explorative on *Perpetual / Terminal*. But when you are as good at filtering classic thrash and melodic death metal through a punk rock framework as this band are, it doesn't matter one jot. The two-stepping rhythms and warp-speed riffing that open *Societal Bile* and *Love Is Fear* or the Integrity-meets-At The Gates melodic brutality of *New Utopian Dream* might seem like easy tropes to rely on, but in the hands of Darkest Hour they sound absolutely box-fresh and essential.



Darkest Hour have never truly received the accolades their work deserves, and there's clearly still a level of hunger and desire to prove themselves that some of their more commercially lauded peers have long since lost.

Credit for that should go, in particular, to the two remaining original members – vocalist John Henry sounds vicious and urgent throughout, and guitarist Mike Schleibaum has once again packed an entire career's worth of great riffs and leads into a single album. That's not

to downplay the contribution of the rest of the band; seldom have a collective of this vintage sounded as tight and in sync as DA do on the pulverising *The Nihilist Undone*, or on the chaotic old-school hardcore and gang vocal-led *My Only Regret*. Seven years since the equally excellent *Godless Prophets & the Migrant Flora*, Darkest Hour prove again why those in the know believe they are one of metal's greatest secrets.

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FOR FANS OF: Unearth, God Forbid, Heaven Shall Burn

STEPHEN HILL



FARSOT

Life Promised Death
PROPHECY PRODUCTIONS

Enigmatic Germans extend the black metal spectrum

Farsot's latest is a dense, grunge-tinged odyssey worthy of the Germans' genre-melting renown. *Nausea's* labyrinthine, visceral mix of despair and aggression sets a precedent for the album's deep dive into thematic darkness. Farsot's cryptic allure – the band are identified as numeric pseudonyms – shimmers ineffably through these seven tracks, using black metal as a launchpad for more a nuanced exploration of styles such as post-metal, grunge and prog. The stylistic fusion invokes a thrilling sense of unpredictability. And when tracks like *Buoyant Flames* uncork the blastbeats, it's an exhilarating nod to Farsot's Norwegian influences. Lyrically compelling and sonically vast, *Life...* is a transfixing voyage that boldly reaffirms this band's avant-garde legacy.

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FOR FANS OF: A Forest Of Stars, Ultha, Almyrkvi

JOE DALY



THE GEMS

Phoenix
NAPALM

Former Thundermother members kick out a new set of jams

In 2023 singer Guernica Mancini was fired from Thundermother and, in a show of solidarity, bassist Mona Lindgren and drummer Emlee Johansson quit, all three quickly forming The Gems and

releasing their debut – a fierce and defiant 'fuck you' of razor-sharp rock'n' roll. There's no avoiding Thundermother's DNA on *Phoenix*, but it fizzies with confidence. Mona, who also plays guitar here, has a chance to truly show off her six-string skills. From Guernica's rich warbling on rabble-rouser Queens to *Like A Phoenix's* FM-friendly riffage and P.S.Y.C.H.O.'s blistering attack, The Gems are intent on keeping the good times rolling.

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FOR FANS OF: The Pretty Reckless, Thundermother, H.E.A.T

HOLLY WRIGHT



GUHTS

Regeneration
NEW HEAVY SOUNDS

Eclectic Brooklynites take a scenic tour through the underworld

Going on name alone, you might expect Guhts to peddle some form of knuckle-dragging sludge, but the reality is very different. *Regeneration* might be slow and immeasurably dense, but the glacial shift of the riffs serve as a backdrop. Starkweather-esque melodies and shimmering, dissonant prettiness are pushed to the fore, while vocalist Amber Gardner puts in a startlingly diverse performance, cooing, crooning and howling as though tumbling headfirst toward the gates of Hell. Piano, smudges of electronica and tremolo-picked moments that blur the lines between post-rock and black metal all play their part, and *Regeneration* benefits mightily from such a colourful palette.

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FOR FANS OF: Isis, King Woman, Deftones

ALEX DELLER



IHSAHN

Ihsahn

CANDLELIGHT / MNEMOSYNE PRODUCTIONS

Orchestral manoeuvres from black metal's brightest maverick

WHEN IHSAHN

RELEASED his lavish, shelf-threatening box set, *The Hyperborean Collection*, in 2021, it was a very clear and purposeful clearing of the decks. From Emperor's four classic albums to solo triumphs like *After* and *Åmr*, the Norwegian has achieved more than most and could easily have slacked off for a bit, satisfied with a job well done. Instead, he's made the most ambitious and extravagant album of his career.

A concept piece devoted to some hazily defined hero's epic journey, *Ihsahn* is a game of two distinct halves. The first presents an astonishing splurge of new songs: still firmly within the Norwegian's self-created wheelhouse of artful, restless black metal, but with full and florid orchestral elements throughout. *Ihsahn* has been mixing strings with metallic bombast for more than 30 years, but never with quite this much unabashed ingenuity and flair. Here, metal band and orchestra are woven seamlessly together, each surge of violins or brass adding colour, definition and extra muscle to these intricate songs' wayward momentum.

And what songs they are. *The Promethean Spark* and *Pilgrimage To Oblivion* are as vicious and volatile as anything in *Ihsahn*'s past, but with more twists, turns and cinematic sumptuousness than ever before; *Twice Born* is three-and-a-half minutes of evolved black metal prog perfection; *Hubris And Blue Devils* is a crazed riot of ideas, from jagged, *Twilight Zone*-style guitar motifs and blistering blastbeats to unsettling oases of warped circus music. Closing epic *At The Heart Of All Things Broken* is staggeringly beautiful and crushing in equal measure, and may be the finest thing *Ihsahn* has ever written.

The album's second half comprises the same 11 songs, arranged solely for the orchestra, and with elegantly immersive results. In its opulent entirety, *Ihsahn* represents a proud and confident raising of the stakes for one of metal's greatest visionaries.

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FOR FANS OF: Emperor, Arcturus, Wilderun

DOM LAWSON



NAKE

Nake

SELF-RELEASED

Prog and sci-fi excursions from Danish instra-metal debutants

This Danish instrumental quartet's debut takes inspiration from John Carpenter and Morricone film scores as much as it does from the likes of Night Verses and Pelican. *Nake* also ventures into prog territory, with retro space-age synths liberally sprinkled throughout. This will either be music to your ears or a sadistic form of audio torture, but props to *Nake* for fully embracing and realising a potentially polarising sound on their first try. *Weaver*'s rhythmic patterns and tribal drums evoke Tool perhaps a tad too closely, but the quartet are capable of surprising turns as well, such as the rip-roaring Malmsteen-esque guitar solo nestled in the middle of opening track *Offering*.

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FOR FANS OF: Between The Buried And Me, John Carpenter, Chimp Spanner

REMPRY DEDMAN



NIGHT FEVER

Dead End

SVART

Danish high-energy hardcore punks know how to do it

These hardcore punks are back, with lashings of raucous energy and deliciously old-school fretwork. The seriously sticky *Lone Wolf* is a perfect example of their full-pelt power and pace, and the rest of the songwriting here is just as strong. Forged for

fuelling moshpits, they're fast and furious without ever losing sight of the hooks and melodies needed along the way. Dynamic frontman Salomon Segers' high, urgent vocal style is still polarising but also offers more variety this time around, as seen with the punchier delivery in *Reunited* and *Up The Wall*. This is a gem.

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FOR FANS OF: Misfits, Tyrant, Municipal Waste

NIK YOUNG



PERSEFONE

Lingua Ignota: Part I

NAPALM

Andorran prog metal underdogs make their bid for stardom

Despite being endorsed by Cynic leader Paul Masvidal and inking a deal with Napalm Records, Persefone still remain massively underrated. The Andorran extreme/progressive metal unit have been dealing in uber-technical melodicism for 20 years now – and here they scream for broader recognition. Openers *Sounds And Vessels* and *One Word* counterbalance the band's complexities with an upfront, singable hook. *The Equable* emphasises the near-operatic pipes of new singer Daniel Rodriguez Flys, and *Lingua Ignota* crams itself with full-throttle Lamb Of God-style riffing. Although these 26 minutes don't do anything that peers from *Ne Obliviscaris* to Allegaeon haven't already attempted, the immediacy and infectiousness should help push Persefone to new heights.

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FOR FANS OF: Allegaeon, Black Crown Initiate, Rivers Of Nihil

MATT MILLS

WORLD SERVICE

Heavy metal uprisings from around the globe



LITOSTH

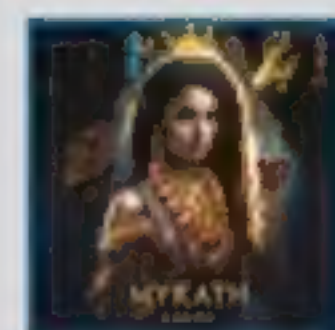
Cesariana

PERSONAL

Unusually for a Brazilian band, Litosth eschew filth in favour of vastness and splendour. Their fourth LP offers classy, wall-of-sound blackened DM: symphonic in scope and executed with perfectionist zeal.

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DOM LAWSON



MYRATH

Karma

EARMUSIC

These Tunisians' sixth LP is their most effective fusion so far of Eastern mysticism and Western metal. Though unapologetically melodic, its muso-friendly thrust and dynamics will render Dream Theater fans agog.

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DAVE LING



PAINT THE SKY RED

Tamat

SELF-RELEASED

This Malaysian post-rock collective bow out with a series of gorgeously melodic soundscapes that build and fade expertly. Filled with sublime nuance and subtleties, *Tamat* rewards repeat listens.

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STEPHEN HILL



STATIC-X

Project: Regeneration Vol. 2

OTSEGO ENTERTAINMENT GROUP

Resurrected industrial metallers keep their batteries charged

CONSIDERING MOST PEOPLE would have fully expected Static-X to have ceased in the aftermath of iconic frontman Wayne Static's passing in 2014, the current iteration of the band is a surprisingly enjoyable one. Once you got past the somewhat troubling image of Wayne's replacement Xero being positioned as a zombified version of his predecessor, the shows the band played in tribute to him were a great reminder of how many fun songs they had.

Maybe even more impressive was the fact that when *Project: Regeneration Vol. 1* was released in 2020, they still sounded worthy of the Static-X name, even if it wasn't quite up to the standard of the band's excellent first pair of millennium-straddling albums, *Wisconsin Death Trip* and *Machine*.

So no one really should be too shocked that *Project: Regeneration Vol. 2* is a perfectly serviceable, and often very enjoyable, Static-X album. It seems impossible to imagine that fans of the band won't be delighted to hear the thumping electronic grooves, juddering riffs and manic, rasping vocal

stylings of their patented death disco all present and correct on tracks like *Zombie* or *Take Control*. Both are hugely catchy and are guaranteed to get heads banging and hips swinging, despite being fairly rudimentary by 2024 standards.

Admittedly, there isn't much in the way of growth, breadth or dynamism here, with every song being some kind of attempt at industrial rock floor filler. Fourteen tracks of that (including bonus tracks), though, does

start to drag a bit, and a bemusing, clunky cover of Nine Inch Nails' *Terrible Lie* shows that Static-X fall short of being considered an A-list band from this genre.

These are just minor quibbles, though. Considering how many people scoffed at the very idea of Static-X without their most recognisable member when this reunion was announced, this line-up continues to prove its worth.

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FOR FANS OF: Pitchshifter, 3Teeth, Powerman 5000

STEPHEN HILL



SHOOTING DAGGERS

Love & Rage

NEW HEAVY SOUNDS

UK queercore trio unleash the true spirit of punk rock

The extent to which the term 'punk rock' is thrown around far too loosely and liberally these days is always brought into sharp focus when a band who exhibit all its best and most essential elements turn up. This London-based, multicultural, queercore trio's debut album is a superbly exciting romp through all the best bits of DC hardcore, the earliest days of CBGB's and the dirtiest, grimmest era of Seattle grunge. It's all delivered with an uncontrollable, utterly uncompromising vitality all too rare in the more sanitised world of modern punk rock. In a mere nine songs and 21 minutes, Shooting Daggers may well have already made 2024's finest punk album.

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FOR FANS OF: X-Ray Spex, Veruca Salt, Bad Brains

STEPHEN HILL



SLOPE

Freak Dreams

CENTURY MEDIA

Germany's unruly funk/punk metallers turn up the heat

Before the Red Hot Chili Peppers became bare-chested denizens of daytime radio, they specialised in a chaotic splurge of punk, funk and psychedelic weirdness that was bold, brash and out of control. Slope take us back to those freaky styley days and, if half of it didn't feel

like a straight rehash, *Freak Dreams* would be magnificent. When they bring in a selection of heavier punk metal riffs on the likes of *Nosedive* and *Ain't Easy*, they end up sounding like the Beastie Boys instead. There's a lot of reckless energy, though, and the Germans actually form the chaos into better songs than the Chilis did back in the day, making this fun but inessential.

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FOR FANS OF: Red Hot Chili Peppers, Beastie Boys, Turnstile

PAUL TRAVERS



EINAR SOLBERG

The Congregation Acoustic

INSIDE OUT

Leprous leader strips down a prog metal masterpiece

By singer/keyboardist Einar Solberg's own admission, *The Congregation* is one of the worst albums to do a stripped-down reinterpretation of. Not only is Leprous' fourth album hailed by many as a masterpiece, so much of its excellence comes from the interplay between guitars, keys and electronica. Naturally, in performing for a livestream alone with just a piano, Einar removes those textures from the music. Yet, the frontman also reaffirms that good songs are good songs, no matter their form. *Slave* is still as anthemic as before, Einar howling the hook and pounding the keys, while his long, uninterrupted croons during *The Price* and *The Flood* equally entice and impress. On his own, the musician's made an emotional counterpoint to one of his band's greatest musical statements.

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FOR FANS OF: Leprous, A.A. Williams, Ólafur Arnalds

MATT MILLS

**SOLBRUD****IIII**

VENOETTA

Exhilarating black metal from the dark corners of Copenhagen

The ambitious fourth full-length from Denmark's Solbrud is testament to the band's innovative spirit. On this double album, the four musicians wrote their own distinct music/lyrics for one vinyl side each, though they all perform on all tracks. The result is a tapestry of black metal artistry, blending luminous melodies with blizzards of cold, scything riffs on *Hvile* and the consciousness-elevating, 15-minute epic *Ædelrød*, as well as punishing blastbeats on the *Når Solen Brydes Del I – IIII* suite. The production by Markus F. Larsen and Flemming Rasmussen, renowned for his work with Metallica, imbues the album with crystalline clarity, accentuating its thematic depth. *IIII* is more than a leap in Solbrud's journey, it's a bold affirmation of their eminent place in the black metal universe. A beacon of confidence, ambition and vision.

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FOR FANS OF: Negură Bunget, The Ruins Of Beverast, Woods Of Ypres

JOE DALY

**TVINNA****Two - Wings Of Ember**

BY NORSE MUSIC

Eluveitie members merge the concepts of nature and nurture

Two - Wings Of Ember is the second of Tvinna's four-part conceptual series.

Conceived by spouses Laura (vocalist of pagan folk band Faun) and Rafael Fella (guitarist of folk metallers Eluveitie), Tvinna combine instrumentation and folklore old and new. *Two* is more experimental and incendiary than 2021's *One - In The Dark*. That album explored the concept of birth; *Two* explores the early stages of life. The spirited chants of Louga, featuring Eluveitie vocalist Fabienne Erni, use the kindling of flame as a metaphor for raising children. *Armo's* rousing folk is blown out of the water with exuberant guitar psychedelia, before the punchy riffs and caustic electronica of the title track. Ritualistic in intent, with moments of psych-rock abandon, *Two* subverts expectations with its vitality and will to experiment.

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FOR FANS OF: Wardruna, Darkher, Myrkur

TOM O'BOYLE

**VANIR****Epitome**

MIGHTY MUSIC

Danish melodic death history buffs tool up for battle

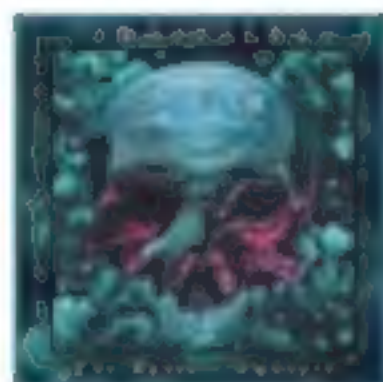
This Danish melodic death sextet bring some of the darkest chapters in the history of their homeland to life on their seventh album. Telling tales of bloody battlefields, meddling archbishops and kings and queens who'll stop at nothing to keep their thrones, the Middle Ages-set *Epitome* is suitably savage. Dispensing with their former folk metal elements, it's their loudest, most vicious effort yet. *Twisting The Knife* kicks it off with a roar. Recounting the Stockholm Bloodbath where nearly 100 people were executed, it features

riffs that could take your head off and catchy, cinematic synths. *Blood Eagle* boasts a battalion of soaring guitar solos, while *Sorte Grethe* is a dramatic, dynamic thriller about the reign of a Danish queen once nicknamed Black Greta. Exhilarating and enthralling, *Epitome* is royally good.

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FOR FANS OF: Amon Amarth, Arch Enemy, Unleashed

EDWIN McFEE

**ZWIELICHT****The Aphotic Embrace**

VAN

German black metallers draw out their sense of the dismal

Putting out your second album two decades into your career doesn't exactly suggest urgency. However, Zwieliht's ('Twilight') habit of lurking around in the underground has paid off here, bettering 2014's *With Love From Sinister* by seriously upping the sense of scale. Their Germanic style of black metal is capable of melody yet resolutely ugly, guiding the ear but not stepping back from the lightless abyss their moniker and album title promise. *Stench Of Rotten Deities* is a seriously strong track, the kind where you don't realise until late it's that been there for 10 minutes, and volatile riff changes as in *Twilight Temple* keep its suffocating force refreshed. Not every long song is as mesmerising, but the sensation of several tons of ocean pressure certainly never lifts. We'll see them in another decade for more bleakness, if we're all still alive.

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FOR FANS OF: The Great Old Ones, Der Weg Einer Freiheit, Wiegand

PERRAN HEYLES



Chelsea Wolfe lures you into an in-between daze

CHELSEA WOLFE**She Reaches Out To She Reaches Out To She**

LOMA VISTA

Mercurial maestro of inner space undergoes another rebirth

FOLLOWING CHELSEA WOLFE'S

career often feels like one of those dreams where you're trailing some playful, puckish figure who's always rounding the next corner before you can fully glimpse them. A chameleonic, magpie-like approach has seen her mix and match from a wide range of sounds, freely drawing from folk, goth, industrial and avant-metal while casting ideas nonchalantly aside only to reintegrate them at later dates.

It's fitting, then, for such a mercurial artist that *She Reaches Out To She Reaches Out To She* should deal with cycles of transformation and rebirth. Opener *Whispers In The Echo Chamber* has Chelsea proclaim 'I've shed a thousand skins since then,' and herein you'll find evidence of her past lives, from the industrial-leaning lurk of 2015's *Abyss* to more recent soundtrack work with composer (and Marilyn Manson collaborator) Tyler Bates.

This is a very different beast to the hushed, intimate Americana of 2019's *Birth Of Violence*. The icy electronica that quietly dappled that release has exploded into the foreground here, while unadulterated, rawk crunch and the influence of 90s industrial dancefloor fillers all swirl around Chelsea's distinctive voice.

At heart, though, *She Reaches...* is perhaps best viewed as a carefully layered art-pop record that has more in common with Tori Amos circa *From The Choirgirl Hotel*, David Bowie's *Blackstar* or that one video where Madonna transforms into a murder of crows. These latter influences give the album an air of familiarity, albeit filtered through the prism that has garnered Chelsea so many fans to date. From the playful plink and infectious pulse of *Eyes Like Nightshade* and the sultry creep of *The Liminal* through to the orchestral sweep of *Unseen World*, it's dense and engagingly dramatic: an enveloping paean to grabbing for one's own future with both hands and running headfirst to meet it.

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FOR FANS OF: Big|Brave, Kate Bush, Kristin Hayer

ALEX DELLER

